

fuligin

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 24 Feb 2002

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Steve Strickland — 24 Feb 2002, 02:32

Ok, I'm sure this is old news, since it involves The Book of the New Sun, but I thought it was interesting.

I was looking up the word 'fuligin' in the dictionary the other day. I was interested to see that sitting right in front of the 'fuligin'-like words (namely, 'fuliginated', meaning 'of a sooty color or appearance'; 'fuligo', meaning 'soot'; and 'fuliginous', meaning 'blackened with soot'), there were several similar sounding words derived from a root with a quite different meaning. These were 'fulgurate' ('emit flashes like lightening'); 'fulguration' ('the action of lightening'; 'in assaying, a brightening in the appearance of a molten metal'); 'fulgurous' ('resembling, full of or charged with lightening').

Like the little girl in the jacal Severian brought back to life, we all know that the fuligin that is blacker than black, when worn by Severian, the torturer who is not a torturer, is in reality whiter than white. Severian is the shadow of the torturer, which means, in Chesterton's terms, that he is not the torturer, not death, but something in fact like the opposite of death; and it is he who brings the white sun as the new sun. As I recall, toward the end of Citadel of the Autarch Severian even laughs at himself as he describes how he exchanged the cloth that is blacker than black for the white that is whiter than white.

So I wonder if Wolfe intentionally selected the term fuligin in part because its root word meaning 'soot' is so similar to the root word meaning 'lightening'. Sort of a play on words. Something like that would certainly be within his bags of tricks, uh, I mean, repertoire.

Steve

Who are you in those bright clothes?" she asked. And then, "Oh, I am dreaming."